

In The Path of Giants

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Category: Halo, Mass Effect

Genre: Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2014-01-25 00:09:49

Updated: 2014-11-16 21:12:55

Packaged: 2016-04-27 04:45:31

Rating: T

Chapters: 4

Words: 6,576

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Opening a dormant relay is not something anyone really plans for, then again neither is being hunted by Batarian pirates.

1. prologue

Prologue

[Unknown system, _Honorata_]

Captain Uto'Kaddi vas Honorata was nervous. It was understandable in his position, chased down by Batarian pirates to a remote system with an inactive relay was enough to make anyone nervous, especially if the migrant fleet was half way across the galaxy and Turian patrols were years apart in this area. To make matters worse he had a plan, most would be happy to have a way out of the war path of the batarians, but not Uto, not today. Not if the plan illegal, insane, and potentially more dangerous than any pirate, not to mention what would happen if the Turians ever found out.

"Captain," called a shaky voice to his left "the beacon is offline, we're ready."

"Good," he reply, his voice steadier than he felt "Now we wait, and pray they don't find us."

Only minutes later their fears were realized as Batarian ships began appearing at the edge of their scanner's range.

"Alright," Uto said "Only one way out now."

"We're ready captain," came Ket'Rah's reply after several seconds "well, as ready as we're going to be, activating a dormant relay."

"Do you have a better plan?"

"No, not really; I just felt it was important to remind you how bad an idea this is before we die"

The conversation abruptly ended as the relay began to activate, the rings around the core spinning faster and faster as power built.

"How much longer?" asked Uto,

"Power output has peaked, it's active"

"Ok then" Uto proclaimed "Lets break council law" as the Honotara accelerated into the relay.

2. Chapter 1

Chapter 1

[Shanxi system, UNSC Final Countdown]

[06:07:2621 MSC 14:31 MST]

Rear Admiral (lower half) David Anderson was nervous, an unusual occurrence for the Man. Standing on the bridge of an Aurora class heavy cruiser with two others and another half-dozen Orion class heavy frigates in system he had no reason to be, yet here he was. The last time he felt this nervous was just before three CCS-class battlecruiser had dropped out of slipspace right above the colony of New Haven. That had been when he still commanded one of the few Autumn II Cruisers that persisted decades after the war.

Outnumbered four to one Anderson had barely managed to keep his ship intact using a version of the Keyes Loop, modified on the fly. He had managed to destroy one of the battlecruiser and disable another before they could fire their energy projectors. The third battlecruiser had managed to avoid the first strike and maneuver to fire its projector. The shot had penetrated the old Autumn II's shields and destroy most of the lower decks, but it missed the primary MAC. Allowing Anderson to fire his crippled ship's main canon, punching a hole straight through the third battlecruiser. Anderson had then finished off the disabled ships with a salvo of Archer missiles.

The battle had earned him a promotion, a new ship, control of a battle group, and a new assignment: Patrol of the Outer Rim, the farthest area humanity had colonized. That in itself should have put him at ease, on the edge of UNSC space the Outer Rim was as far from any known threat as it could get. Yet he was still nervous.

"Anything Edie?" Anderson asked,

"No sir, nor will there be in five minutes when you ask again." answered the AI her spherical blue and gray avatar appearing above the pedestal to Anderson's right.

Giving the AI a stern look Anderson responded "It never hurts to be careful"

"Of course sir, but what are you expecting?"

"Nothing hopefully, but I have a feeling"

"Ah, human intuition," Edie said, "I never have understood it."

Letting out a sigh Anderson turned back to the holotank displaying the status of the system. With three planets, and Shanxi only barely habitable, and a large ice cloud surrounding the system it was almost overlooked by colonial expansion project for use. But for some reason the UNSC decided it would make a sufficient military outpost despite its insignificant tactical value.

So here he was, for months he had stood watch, waiting for any sign of trouble, and only today had he been this nervous. Anderson took it as a sign things were about to get interesting, and he hated when things got interesting.

"Well sir, it seems I was incorrect," Edie announced, interrupting his thoughts "I am detecting an unusual energy buildup in one of the planetoids on the near edge if the ice cloud"

"_In_ a planetoid?"

"Aye, sir," Edie responded "And it does not match any energy signatures on record, though I cannot accurately analyze it further from this distance"

_So this is where it starts _though Anderson before commanding "Have all ships prepare for combat, and prepare for in-system jump."

"Aye, sir."

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

[06:07:2621 MSC 14:45 MST]

"Approaching anomaly, initializing high intensity scans" Edie announced as the battle group approached the decaying planetoid. Already chunks of ice were being blown away giving way to the blue light and alien mechanism that lay beneath the dying world.

"Underneath the planetoid appears to be some type of unknown device, unknown origin, and unknown purpose" announce Edie "thought it does not match any form of weapon, and it seems to bear a striking resemblance to a tuning fork."

"Well that's something" Anderson said "and prepare a data package for HIGHCOM, I have a feeling they'll want to know about this" he added after a moment's pause. Observing the now freed object from the main screen on the bridge, Anderson noticed its unnerving familiarity to covenant vessels, with its curving architecture and blue hues. It sent chills down his spine; the whole situation did, finding an unknown device built by unknown hands at the forefront of human exploration. The entire setup was just like a bad science fiction novel, and of course just as Anderson was damming the thing into the deepest pits of hell in his mind, it spat out a ship.

"ALERT: UNKNOWN CONTACT, ALL CREW TO BATTLE STATIONS ALL CREW TO

"BATTLE STATIONS" began blaring from speakers across the battle group moments after the ship appeared.

"Get the frontal projector trained on that ship now! I want missile pods A through F on that vessel and plasma lines running hot yesterday; have the rest of the battle group target the device! Edie!" Anderson commanded.

"The unknown is 106 meters long, I am not detecting any known forms of weaponry, and the ship is only showing minimal power output for its size, thought there are large gravitational fluctuations emanating from the ships, designating vessel U1." Edie responded to the implied query.

{ME ME ME ME}

"Well here we," Ket announced "and what do you know, we're not dead"

"That surprises you?" asked Uto

"A little, I was kind of expecting to smash into debris as soon as we came through." Ket admitted turning in his chair to face the captain

"Well we're not out of the scrap yard yet boys," announced the feminine voice of Lia'Koris from the other side of the bridge, "we got seven contacts commin' at us and either the sensors are broke or three of 'em are bigger than the Destiny Ascension."

After a moment of stunned silence Ket spoke up, "I told you this was a bad idea."

"Oh because the pirates would have been such a better option," Uto exclaimed turning towards Ket.

"Girls, girls you're both pretty now can we focus on the giant ships headed right at us." Lia exclaimed.

"Well they haven't fired on us yet so they can't be too bad right?" Ket asked now looking at Lia.

"One of them appears to be targeting us"

"Bosh'tet" Uto swore.

"We at least it can't get any worse" Ket said stupidly.

"Hold on," said Lia turning once again to her terminal, "looks like the Batarians decided to join in, they're commin' through the relay, and oh look at that, their fleet seems to have tripled in size, must have called for reinforcements, thanks Ket,"

"What? How is this my fault?" Ket called angrily.

"Well mister 'well at least it can't get any worse' whose idea was it to hack the pirates's systems to try and blackmail them into giving us ships!?" Lia yelled back. Following the exchange everyone in the bridge took a moment to glare at Ket as if he alone was responsible for their current position.

A small "Oh," was all Ket could muster.

{ME ME ME ME}

[Unknown system, _Excessive Force_]

Captain Vorhess of the Blue Suns mercenary group was happy. This was a terrifying prospect for anyone who knew him, as he was only ever happy when someone else was dead, dying, soon to be dead, or being tortured. And for the Quarians he was chasing it was almost certainly a death sentence, or it would be if Vorhess's sponsors didn't want them alive. Why they were wanted alive was something Vorhess didn't particularly care about, thought the "assistance" he was given did give him pause. Thirty five ships, and ten of them cruisers, was slight overkill for one Quarian frigate in his opinion, but he wasn't paid for his opinion.

Preparing to go through the newly opened relay Vorhess took a moment to reflect on the sheer audacity of the Quarians to open a relay. If he was honest a small part of him actually respected them for it, he also took it as a sign of the spread of his fearsome reputation. Never hurt to stroke one's ego after all.

"Prepared to jump sir" called out a voice to his left.

"Then what are we waiting for?" Vorhess questioned "After them!"

{ME ME ME ME}

Arriving in the system the hastily assembled fleet almost immediately detected the Quarian frigate attempting to flee. Orders to disable them hastily dispensed before their sensors could see the UNSC battle group just out of their sensors' range.

"Sir! Seven contacts detected, six cruisers and threeâ€|" the sensors operator faltered, "three dreadnaughts in combat formation."

Vorhess clenched his fists, "we can't leave any witnesses to this," he stated reluctantly, "we're dead if we do, destroy them."

As soon as he gave the command he felt a deep sense of dread, this was going to be a costly fight.

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

"Thirty-five additional contacts detected ranging from 160 meters to 632 meters; designating U2 through U36, gravitational fluctuations similar to U1 detected, and minimal power signatures for ships of their size." Eddie announced as the unknown fleet arrived through the device. The bridge of the Final Countdown erupted into organized chaos as the crew relayed orders and acquired new targets, and the holotank began displaying the new wedge-shaped ships.

"U15 has fired on U1" announced Eddie amidst the chaos, "U1 has been hit, and it appears to have been disabled"

"wha-" Anderson began.

"U2-U36 re-orienting, they appear to be targeting us Captain." Eddie

interrupted moments before the unknown fleet opened fire. Streams of small kinetic rounds flew from the unknowns alongside a small number of missiles, the rounds impacting almost as quickly as they were fired and the missiles shot down as soon as they were in range of the battle group's point defense systems.

"Unknowns firing, hostile intentions confirmed," Edie announced unnecessarily.

"Fire forward projector, target the lead ships," ordered Anderson, "all ships fire at will, concentrate on the Frigates first." He continued over FLEETCOM.

The Final Countdown shook as its powerful main weapon gored one of the lead frigates and hit an unsuspecting corvette behind it. Moments later the other two Auroras fired their projectors spearing three frigates.

"Shields down to seventy percent," Edie announced, "projector recharged in forty seconds, plasma lines are hot, enemy vessels breaking formation, we've scattered them sir."

"I want Bowman pods A through H targeting the centermost ships," Anderson commanded staring at the holotank.

The Orions began firing their MACs, spitting out 600 ton depleted uranium shells at 40 kilometers per second. Unfortunately the rounds took all of thirty seconds to reach their targets giving them time to evade the hits, but a twenty second recharge time allowed for semi-predictive aiming. A rhythm of back and forth fire emerged as the Unknowns would evade a MAC round, position to fire their own, and attempt to evade the next round headed towards them, not always successfully. An unlucky cruiser caught a second MAC round and promptly exploded. Complementing the MACs, hundreds of missiles streamed from the UNSC formation, as they neared the Unknown ships point defense systems sprung to life taking out more than two thirds of the projectiles, still several vessels fell to the strike despite shields snapping into existence at the points of impact.

"Edie prepare a priority alert for HIGHCOM, Winter Contingency and Cole Protocol are in effect," Anderson ordered, "And get me firing solutions for the plasma turrets, target those corvettes!"

"Aye, sir."

Plasma torpedoes rocketed from the three cruisers, chasing down the elusive corvettes, surprisingly the Unknowns shielding was able to stop the kinetic energy of the torpedoes, but not the heat and radiation that melted parts of the armor and cooked the crews alive.

"Shields down to twenty percent, Last Stand reports shielding at ten percent and dropping, and In The Fray reports completely depleted shields and damage to their armor belt," Edie announced, "Orions reporting shielding at roughly sixty-five percent across all vessels."

"Divert power from the projector into the slipspace engines," Anderson ordered as he began to input codes into his console, "put us behind the bastards."

"Commander this course of action-" Began Edie.

"Yes, I know, suicidal and rash, just do it," Anderson interrupted.

{ME ME ME ME}

"Commander Lead dreadnaught is breaking formation and it'sâ€|" called the sensors operator, "and it's gone sir! I'm seeing massive amounts of radiation but no other sign of a breached reactor."

"Well we'll count that as a kill, continue evasive actions, target the other damaged dreadnaught, get that thing out of the fight!" Vorhess commanded. Minutes into the battle and more than half his ships were destroyed by the aliens. He knew this would be a costly fight, but he never expected the aliens to be able to take so many hits.

"Sir! Radiation spike behind us, the enemy dreadnaught is back! It's behind us! It's launching missiles;" the sensors operator exclaimed, "Hundreds of contacts inbound!"

As the operator finished his announcement the dark of space was illuminated by thirty-six miniature suns spawning into existence for mere seconds, shorting out most of the Batarian systems.

"What was that?" yelled Vorhess in his now dark bridge.

"Radiological alarm tripped just before we lost power," called an engineer, "I think we just got nuked."

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

"Detonations successful sir, but we have taken heavy damage, D through G deck breached, plasma lines are compromised, and several computing systems have been disabled, but we have destroyed most of the enemy ships, only three remain largely intact." Edie announced as the electro-magnetic energy of the explosions subsided.

"Take them out."

{ME ME ME ME}

Alarms and warning lights flashed and blared throughout the bridge of the Honotara, yet no one dared speak lest they somehow incur the wrath of the white-gray behemoths that had completely destroyed the Batarian fleet with a four to one disadvantage. To say the crew was terrified would be a grievous understatement.

"First contact package," Uto managed to say, "Do we have a first contact package, or a language program or even aâ€|aâ€|a friendly picture we can send them?"

"No, why would we-" Ket began,

"Hold on," Lia interrupted "I have a language packet for Khelish, but the communication systems are offline"

"Get everyone we can manage on that."

"Why should we waste our time?" Ket asked, "We need to get the engines going and get out of here."

"Because Ket, in case you hadn't, those ships just destroyed the entirety or the Batarian fleet, with energy weapons I might add." Uto answered, "They also haven't attacked us, so either they think we're already dead or they don't see us a threat."

"So we use this time to run."

"No, we use this time to make friends with them."

"Oh yeah, let's just go make friends with Rachni while we're at it, and hey let's get the Krogen in on this as well."

"Ket this could be the greatest opportunity we've ever encountered, think of what we could do if we could these beings on our side!"

"IF THEY DON'T KILL US!" Ket exploded.

"We shouldn't run" interrupted Lia causing the crew, who were focused on Ket and Uto, to turn to her, "These things look really militarized and we know nothing about them other than they will retaliate against hostile action, for all we know they could take us running as a hostile action and kill us."

"Well then how do we know they won't kill us if we try and contact them?" Ket asked.

"We don't"

Author's Note

Well here we are again after numerous revisions and rewrites and only... Nine months. Yeah sorry about that. But hey its longer, not too well edited I'm afraid I only have myself staring at this for a couple of hours, so I will have undoubtable missed things. In any case I shall endeavor to update this fic more reliable in the future.

Also if anyone has names for UNSC vessels that they would be willing to let me use that would be fantastic.

(10/8/2014)

Significant revision of combat scene, the UNSC battle group actually takes significant damage as they are outnumbered 4 to 1 and MAC's still fire relatively slow. Hopefully this version makes more sense.

Thank you to everyone who offered their thoughts and ship names and special thanks to FranticHamster for their incredible knowledge of both the Mass Effect and Halo universe and calculating the rough force yields of ships of different sizes for Mass Effect, making me realize not all frigates operated like the **_Normandy,**_** and numerous other contributions.**

3. Chapter 2

(10/8/2014)

Revision to Chapter 1, largely in the combat scene, long story short, the Batarians put up a good fight, Anderson's Cruisers are damaged, and nukes were used somewhat liberally.

Chapter 2

[Shanxi system, _Final Countdown_]

[06:07:2621 MSC 15:02 MST]

"Shields at two percent and rising sir, breaches on decks D through G have been sealed, tertiary reactors offline, major damage to the Armor belt, and point defense systems are fried, 52 casualties so far and 73 crewmen are currently receiving medical attention," Edie announced, "_Last Stand _reports shields at ten percent and rising, _In The Fray _reports damage to their armor belt and multiple breached decks, and the Orions are reporting seventy percent shielding, it looks like they chose to concentrate fire on our cruisers sir."

"And the disabled ship?" Anderson questioned.

"It has stopped venting atmosphere and appears to have stabilized itself, and it is still generating gravitational fluctuations." Edie replied "It has made no attempt at contact."

"This is one hell of a mess Edie," Anderson said after a pause.

"Aye, sir"

One hell of a mess indeed, first contact with a new species and already everything had gone south. Battle damage left them sitting ducks if any more attackers showed up, and any reinforcements were hours away.

"U1 is transmitting sir," Edie said interrupting his thoughts, "data packet received, quarantining and analyzing."

"It would appear to be a translation program sir" Edie announced after several tense minutes, "beginning translation."

"Alert me the moment you have something, we need to know what the hell is going here." Anderson ordered.

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

[06:07:2621 MSC 15:43 MST]

"Priority message from HIGHCOM, the 12th fleet is inbound ETA 15 minutes, 22nd fleet will be in system in six hours, battle groups _Bastion _and _Defiance _will be supplementing the fleets within eight hours." Edie announced, "Also I have translated the data package, but it appears partially incomplete despite its surprising complexity."

"Good we'll have something to hand over to the fleet when they arrive."

{ME ME ME ME}

"Engines are still down but we managed to get communications up to transmit the language package," Lia announced from her console, "and we've had a head count, we lost five; Rena, Shala, Ken, Han, and Kar."

"This day just keeps getting better and better." muttered Ket.

"Well, we haven't been blown up yet." offered Lia.

"Don't jinx us we've had enough already." said Ket right before Lia's console began beeping and flashing. Turning back to her station Lia became engrossed with the data moving across her screen.

"Oh," she said after looking over the data.

"Oh?" questioned Ket, "was that a good 'oh' or bad 'oh'?"

"It was an 'oh that's why the batarians sent so many ships to get this back' oh."

"Ok, so why were they so gun-ho?"

"Just look," Said Lia gesturing to her screen and moving away to allow Ket a better view. Ket moved to her console and began looking through the information, not entirely comprehending its significance.

"Look at how many ships are recorded on duty," Lia said to speed Ket's understanding along. As Ket began to look over the information again the realization hit him.

"There are too many ships for this to be just pirate operations," commented Ket.

"No," Lia retorted, "There are too many ships for this to be the Batarians, and look where the routes are scheduled to go," as understanding finally hit Ket; a look of horror only barely visible beneath his visor, as he understood the ramifications.

"These are Turian documents, the kind of stuff they don't want in the hands of pirates," Ket said.

"Or Quarians," added Lia, "Just think what we could do with these, avoid their patrols on salvage runs, know where to take the fleet next to avoid most of the hassle, and just imagine what pirates and slavers would do with this."

"So," Ket said, "what do we do with it," gesturing to the console.

Crossing her arms and staring at the screen Lia though over their situation. In her trance she almost didn't notice a voice across the cramped bridge calling out radiation spikes being detected. Though

she defiantly noticed when that same voice called out that there were more of the behemoths materializing where those radiation spikes were.

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

[06:07:2621 MSC 15:59 MST]

"12th fleet in system sir" Edie announced unnecessarily, "Vice Admiral Haywood is on the comm sir."

Nodding towards her avatar, Anderson turned to a large monitor mounted near his command station. The screen flickered and the face of Vice Admiral Haywood, a man in his 60's with salt and pepper hair, staring at him with intense focus.

"Sir," said Anderson as he saluted.

"Admiral Anderson," intoned Haywood, "Good to see you again, though I Had hoped to meet in better circumstances"

"As did I sir,"

"well here we are" said Haywood "anything happen since your last report?"

"Aye sir, we received a data package containing what we assume is the non-hostile's language which has been translated."

"Good, and have you contacted them yet?" Haywood questioned.

"No sir, we were waiting on the fleet," came Anderson's reply.

"Alright then have the translation sent over and we'll get this party started," Haywood said, "Move your damaged vessels to the refit station we brought along and get your group ready for combat, I have a feeling we haven't seen the last of the bastards who attacked us."

The screen went black as Haywood disconnected. Anderson turned back to his crew and announced the plans for repairs and their continued operations in system. As he began to tell Edie to send the translations he was unsurprised to hear the task had already been completed.

{ME ME ME ME}

"So," Began Uto, "Batarian pirates got their hands on the patrol routes and exact martial strength of the Turian navy,"

"yes," confirmed Lia.

"Which we stole thinking it was just their raiding plans,"

"uh-huh"

"And now they probably are going to try their hardest to remove any evidence this information existed outside the Hierarchy," he

finished.

"Yeah, that's what I figure will happen."

Sighing Uto sat further back in his chair, the rest of the bridge quitter that usually, all considering what was likely to happen to them. A soft "keelah se'lai" came from the front of the bridge. Then the quite was pierced by a loud ping from the communications console.

"Were being hailed, looks like it's the big guys," called out the comms operator.

"Put it through," Uto said moving towards the console, "Let's try and get on their good side."

As the communication channel open there was silence punctuated by the static of background interference. Neither side spoke, perhaps stalled by the enormity of the situation. Then Uto took a deep breath and began:

"This is Captain Uto'Kaddi vas Honorata of the Quarion vessel Honorata, we come with peaceful intentions," he said with a voice sturdier than he expected. They waited barely a second before the reply came.

"_Greetings Captain Uto'Kaddi vas Honorata, I am Vice Admiral James Ryan Haywood of the UNSC Kursk, commander of the UNSC's 12th fleet, I too have peaceful intentions._"

Uto somewhat doubted the peaceful intentions of a fleet being led by what appeared to be, if the sensors weren't finally failing, a five kilometer warship, but the sentiment was nice.

"_Captain Uto'Kaddi vas Honorata before we proceed with anything further, I need to know who attacked my people, and if they will be back." _Said the Vice Admiral before Uto could formulate a response.

"They were a group of pirates, largely made up of a species called Batarians, and they are probably coming back,"

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

[06:07:2621 MSC 16:50 MST]

Vice Admiral James Ryan Haywood stood in front of his command podium watching his officers as they moved to coordinate his fleet. Reviewing the data from Anderson's battle Haywood felt he could hold the pirates here, if they were pirates. Captain Uto'Kaddi seemed evasive when asked why exactly the , if of course their species speech patterns were similar. But the conversation he had with the Captain had been enlightening nonetheless; these Batarians had a government that funded itself mainly with piracy and slave trade. Uto'Kaddi's people, the Quarions, were a nomadic space faring people, something he would like to know more about if he could speak again with the Captain, assuming he wasn't lying of course.

Though there was still the looming threat of an attack, Haywood particularly secure considering Anderson had held his position

outnumbered four to one. He doubted Pirates would be able to gather four hundred ships before the 22nd arrived, though it never hurt to be paranoid, so he had HORNET mines placed near the "relay", as the Quarans called it, just to be sure.

"Quarian vessel has docked with the Still Here sir," called an officer.

"Good, get repairs underway, and see what you can get from their systems without them noticing," Haywood said, addressing an A.I.

"Of course sir," replied Nix, the A.I. assigned to his fleet's prowler.

In an effort to smooth things along with their new friends Haywood had offered the Quarans assistance in repairing their vessel, after all the Still Here could dock with virtually anything and have it running again within a matter of hours. The three kilometer square refit station would also be repairing Anderson's damaged cruisers. And of course while they were docked, their systems could be easily accessed and their story confirmed, just to be safe. Never could be too trusting with xenos after all.

"Alright than, let's get the welcome party going," commanded Haywood moving to the elevator, "preparations are complete I assume."

"Aye sir," said Ares, the A.I. of the Kursk.

In addition to the offer of repairs, Haywood had invited the Quarian captain aboard to "build friendship between their peoples" and learn more about where the Quarans and Batarians came from and what else was out there. With a predatory grin Haywood exited the elevator and moved to tram system to take him to the Lower hanger deck where Uto'Kaddi would be brought.

Author's note

Thank you to everyone who offered their criticism of my story, I hope I can make something and your reviews help tremendously, and special thank you to FranticHamster for their continued help with this story, without you this would not be all that it is. Sorry this chapter is so short, it is really just set up for the next chapter.

4. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

They looked like Asari. That was all Uto could think about as he was taken to see the Vice Admiral, they looked like paler Asari. He was being escorted in one of their transports, a pelican they called it, to their flagship. He tried making conversation with the two soldiers inside, but they were definitely not like the Asari, more like Turians, they stayed silent the whole flight. It unnerved him how silent the black-armored beings were, with only their faces visible through clear visors; they gave the impression of emotionless machines.

The flight was longer than expected; the pelican was slower than any

shuttle he'd been in before. It gave him far too much time with his thoughts, these humans were a complete unknown; they could be taking him to his death for all he knew, or maybe they were controlled by A.I. overlords, or just really wanted to see how Quarions tasted. His thoughts were silenced when the sounds of the engines shifted dramatically from the loud roar of thrusters, to a humming sound.

"_We're here_" announced one of the soldiers suddenly. The ramp of the transport began to drop almost as the soldier finished speaking. Uto stoop and the soldiers moved to flank him, walking down the ramp he saw the greeting party. Standing in what looked like a large fighter bay stood rows of armed soldiers, enclosed in green and black armor, stood on either side of a walkway. Halfway down the walkway the soldiers changed, clad in bulkier armor than the previous warriors they towered over every other being in the room.

Standing at the end of the rows of soldiers stood a lone human in a gray uniform and a clear helmet. As he approached the human, he noticed it looked older than the soldiers escorting him, the fur on its head looked like it was turning gray.

"_Captain Uto'Kaddi, I am Vice Admiral James Ryan Haywood,_" the figure spoke, its words not matching the movement of its lips, "_We spoke briefly before, it is good to meet you in person._"

"It is good to meet you as well Vice Admiral James Ryan Haywood," Uto replied.

"_Captain if you would follow me we have prepared a room to begin talks,_" The Vice Admiral said, with a smile on his face that did not look quite right for some reason.

Following the Admiral through the corridors of the massive ship Uto noticed how empty it felt. The corridors were spacious, and looked well like they were built for a lot of traffic. He supposed they didn't want to spook him, which was fine by him as the giant soldiers following him were particularly terrifying. He wasn't even sure the soldiers were organics; he couldn't see their faces through their gold visors to make sure, if those were visors and no some form of sensor for synthetic killing machines.

Their arrival at a tram stopped his paranoid internal ramblings. Admiral Haywood informed him the tram would take them deeper into the ship, to a conference room they had set up for the meeting. As the party entered the tram Uto had the sudden realization that he could be killed at any moment and no one would ever know, the Migrant Fleet had no idea where he was, the Batarians could care less, and his crew was in the same situation.

As the full gravity of his situation hit him the tram arrived at its destination and the Admiral led him into the conference room. The room was a gray like the rest of the ship, but oval shaped, in contrast to the sharp angles of the corridors. In the center was an oval shaped table surrounded by chairs, and on the opposite side of the doors several banners hung limp on metal poles.

Taking a seat on the far side of the table Admiral Haywood gestured to a chair across from him, inviting Uto to sit. As he sat in the chair, a holographic figure popped up in the chair next to the

Admiral.

"_Greetings Captain Uto'Kaddi vas Honorata, I am Minerva, the A.I. assigned to monitor these talks-_

Almost as soon as the thing told him it was an A.I., Uto stood up so fast his chair fell over. In his haste to back away from the A.I. he almost tripped over his fallen chair, and almost didn't notice the soldiers aiming their weapons at him. Only the realization that he was most likely about to be killed brought his mind back to the situation, that and The Admirals harsh voice.

"_Captain Uto'Kaddi," _he said, "_Is something wrong._"

It came out sounding more like a threat than a question, and was punctuated by the soldiers aiming their weapons directly at his head. He realized he probably should explain in he like having a head.

"My apologies Admiral, but my people have had bad experiences with A.I." Uto said, "Specifically when they turned on us and drove us from our homeworld."

"_Ah_, " Said Haywood, "_my condolences captain_. "

The guards at his sides lowered their weapons and stepped back, and Haywood gestured to the chair beside the one Uto had knocked down.

"_Captain I can assure you our A.I. would never rise against us, they have been a part of our society for centuries and have been nothing but loyal to our people_" at Haywood's words Uto began to move towards the chair previously gestured at.

"How can you be certain?" He asked

"_Because even in our darkest hour they did not abandon us, they will stay true to our cause as long as we are here to have one."_ Haywood said by way of answer, "_And Captain neither of us has the time to argue over this, you've put us in a tight spot, so if you could start with these 'Batarians'._"

"Uh, yes, the Batarians," began Uto hesitantly, "they're governed by the Hegemony, I don't know much about how they operate other than they pay and supple pirates and slavers to keep their economy going, they group you fought off will likely send someone to find out what happened to their fleet, you're not likely to encounter numbers like the group that followed us."

"_They use pirates and slavers to fuel their economy?_" the A.I. asked.

"Yes, their whole economy is based on slave trade." Uto answered tersely.

"_And nothing has been done to stop this?_" she asked.

"Ah, no, the council doesn't see them as a large enough threat to do anything about them."

"_This council,_" Said the Admiral, "_you briefly mentioned them

earlier, what is it exactly?"

"The Council is the governing body of the known galactic community; it's made up of a representative of the three most powerful races and they basically influence or control all of known space." Uto explained.

"_I'm going to need more Captain,_" said Haywood, with a grin that gave Uto the strangest sense of foreboding.

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

[Unknown system UNSC _Edge of the Abyss_]

[06:08:2621 MSC 10:00 MST]

Fleet Admiral Thomas Lasky sat in a circular room with a black conference table in the center. Around the table sat the Commander-and Chief of the Office of Naval Intelligence (CINCONI) Serin Osman, Commander Jack Harper from ONI section one, and General Norman Hughes. The meeting had been hastily convened to determine the UNSC's next move in regards to first contact with the Batarian and Quarian peoples.

"Our most immediate concern is Batarian retaliation," commented Hughes.

"There's nothing to retaliate against," replied Osman, "from what we can tell they don't even know we're here, and the 12th and 16th fleets should be more than enough to deal with them."

"It's the council that's going to be our real issue," said Harper, "from what the Quarian has said and what we took from their systems our legal systems aren't very compatible."

"Ignoring the blatant breach of protocol Commander Harper is right, but we're going to need more information," said Lasky,
"Osman?"

"Prowlers are being prepped as we speak, we have a list of high priority worlds lifted from the Quarans and we'll be monitoring all of them within the week," Osman answered, "and it was Admiral Haywood who gathered the Intel, none of my spooks were involved."

"Haywood hasn't really been one for the rules sir," added Hughes.

"Alright, let's move on," Lasky conceded, "The device they used to travel, the 'mass relay', do we have anything to shut it down?"

"No, but we do have this," Harper said, handing a data pad to the Fleet Admiral.

While Lasky read through the data, Hughes turned to Harper with a questioning glace. Harper simply shrugged and gestured to Osman, who was not amused it the slightest.

"How long have we you known about these things?" said Lasky minutes later. Angry after having read the reports of another pair of relays that ONI had found and kept secret.

"Two months," returned Osman, "You were going to be informed next week."

"Amazing," he muttered, "Perhaps it would suit ONI to be more transparent with such important information in the future,"

Osman offered no response but a tight smile, both of them knew that wouldn't happen. The discussion stopped as the two most powerful individuals in the UNSC held an intense staring contest, waiting for the other to look away first.

"We're getting a bit off topic," said Harper trying, and failing, to diffuse the situation, "This Council could pose a serious threat to the UNSC."

"True," agreed Hughes, "from what Haywood found the Turians could match us ship for ship, albeit their ships are significantly less powerful, if our encounter with the batarians tells us anything."

"And the other two Council Races, they could have similar martial power," added Hughes.

"But they're constrained by the relays; they could only hit Shanxi," said Lasky pulling himself from his contest with Osman, "The simplest solution is to turn the colony into a fortress."

"I concur," said Osman, "With the proper defenses we could hold those of the council indefinitely."

"The Quarans could also help against the council," suggested Harper further directing the discussion, "They already have grievances, if we offer them a good enough deal, they'll abandon the Council."

"Then we make them an offer they cannot refuse," Lasky said with grim finality.

{UNSC UNSC UNSC UNSC}

PLNB PRIORITY TRANSMISSION [CLASSIFIED]

ENCRYPTION CODE: [CLASSIFIED]

FROM: CODENAME CONSTABLE

TO: CINCONI

SUBJECT: [CLASSIFIED]

Successful transference of cruiser weight entity, further testing required but as of now, BIFROST is operational.

END TRANSMISSION

Author's Note

**Well chapter 3 suffered a slight delay as the Master Chief Collection just came out (so much new info), and with Dragon Age just

around the corner I wanted to get this out before any more delays.
Still a bit short, but it is still more setup. **

**Thank you to everyone who reviewed, your input is incredibly
valuable. **

End
file.